

Committee on Government Reform

Tom Davis, Chairman



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Contact: David Marin/Scott Kopple
(202) 225-5074

Striking a Balance between Homeland Security and a Healthy Economy

Government Reform to Examine the Impact of New Visa Process on Foreign Travel to the U.S.

What: Government Reform Committee Oversight Hearing: "Smooth Sailing or an Impending Wreck? The Impact of New Visa and Passport Requirements on Foreign Travel to the United States"

When: Thursday, July 10, 2003, 10:00a.m.

Where: Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

Background:

The Government Reform Committee is aware of delays in the visa process for many business and tourist travelers attempting to enter the United States. **The Committee is seeking to examine the balance between implementing needed security measures and facilitating commerce.**

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11th, the State Department has tightened its policy to wait to grant visa requests only after the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other agencies in the United States have completed necessary security checks. Another delay is caused in the mere wait for a visa interview in the countries that are currently conducting such interviews. On top of these existing problems, consulates in the near future will be required to interview nearly all visa applicants, which is expected to cause yet even more delays. Finally, an October deadline approaching requiring foreign visitors to use machine-readable passports, the members of the traveling public, especially those from countries in the visa waiver program, may not be informed of nor prepared for these changes. Businesses at home and abroad could experience severe effects from delays and confusion.

Through this hearing, the Committee will gain a good picture of the important security measures the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are implementing to protect the homeland from foreign visitors who would do us harm. The Committee will also learn about ways in which potential damage to American business and tourism from these measures can be avoided or mitigated.

Witnesses:

Ms. Janice L. Jacobs, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services, U.S. Department of State;

A witness from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security;

Mr. Robert J. Garrity, Jr., Acting Assistant Director, Records Management Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation;

Mr. John Marks, National Chair, Travel Industry Association of America;

Mr. Randel Johnson, Vice-President of Labor, Immigration and Employee Benefits, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and

Mr. Richard Pettler, Partner, Fragomen, Del Rey, Burnsen & Loewy, P.C.

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